

# **FROM VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPHERES TO GLOBAL JUSTICE: A CRITICAL THEORY OF INTERNETWORKED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS <sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

From the early '90s when the EZLN (the *Zapatistas*), led by *Subcommandte* Marcos, first made use of the Internet, to the late '90s with the defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Trade and Investment and the anti WTO protests in Seattle, Quebec, and Genoa, it became evident that new, qualitatively different kinds of social protest movements were emergent. These new movements seemed diffuse and unstructured, yet at the same time, they forged unlikely coalitions of labor, environmentalists, feminists, peace and global social justice activists collectively critical of the adversities of neo-liberal globalization and its associated militarism. Moreover, the rapid emergence and worldwide proliferation of these movements, organized and coordinated through the Internet, raised a number of questions that require rethinking social movement theory. Specifically, the electronic networks that made contemporary globalization possible also led to the emergence of "virtual public spheres" and in turn, "Internetworked Social Movements."

Social movement theory has typically focused on local structures, leadership, recruitment, political opportunities and strategies from framing issues to orchestrating protests. While this tradition still offers valuable insights, we need to examine unique aspects of globalization that prompt such mobilizations, as well as their democratic methods of participatory organization and clever use of electronic media. Moreover, their emancipatory interests become obscured by the "objective" methods of social science whose "neutrality" belies a tacit assent to the status quo. It will be argued that the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory offers a multi-level, multi-disciplinary approach that considers the role of literacy and media in fostering modernist bourgeois movements as well as anti-modernist fascist movements. This theoretical tradition offers a contemporary framework in which legitimacy crises are discussed and participants arrive at consensual truth claims; in this process, new forms of empowered, activist identities are fostered and negotiated that impel cyberactivism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As Marx so loudly proclaimed, and Foucault reiterated, domination fosters resistance. Throughout history, certain historical moments have been more or less amenable to social mobilizations (Tarrow, 1998; Markoff, 1996). Thus the French revolution followed the bankruptcy of the Bourbon court. In face of oppressive political

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to note his appreciation to his graduate students, Douglas Morris and Andrew Fraker, who made important contributions to this paper.

economic conditions, absent ideologies or possibilities of social transformation, people have typically retreated from injustice and social adversity through religious “abnegations of the world” that in turn often acted as a source of this worldly pacification that sustained domination. This was seen in early Christianity as well as various expressions such as Sufi Islam to Zen Buddhism. For Weber, *Protestant asceticism and active engagement in this world was atypical, yet Protestant mobilizations paved the ways for modern social transformations led by mobilized agents*.<sup>2</sup> This was already evident with Reformation and English Civil War.

Following the Enlightenment critiques of society and politics embraced by the bourgeoisie, it was held that people could and should govern themselves and be active participants in democratic, representative governance.<sup>3</sup> If people came to realize the arbitrary, consensual nature of legitimacy, believe in universal rights for every wo/man, and understood that *power rested on consent to authority claims, people could withdraw consent and transform the polity*. Modern political mobilizations typically began with critiques of the adversities of existing conditions, attributions of “causes” from despotic dynastic rulers to greedy capitalist; they envisioned strategic agendas to realize an alternative social imaginary to attain a desirable state of affairs. This might range from changing existing social policies, to transforming social structures and cultures and indeed, at times, lead to the violent overthrow of governments.

*Technologies of communication have been integral moments of modern social mobilizations*.<sup>4</sup> The “ideas” of modernity, spread through *print media*, discussed and debated in various “public spheres,” gave rise to various democratic social mobilizations in the 18th and 19th centuries (Habermas, 1989). These were typically of a republican nature, e.g., the American and French revolutions.<sup>5</sup> With industrialization, the *telegraph* and lithograph, and inexpensive newspapers, there was another wave of progressive social movements such as nationalism, unionization, abolition and suffrage that were concerned largely with issues of economic or political rights.<sup>6</sup> Socialist revolutions were inspired by Marx’s diagnosis of capital and a democratic socialist imaginary.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> C. we began to see the adroit use of *radio* and *film* by Hitler and the Nazis to rally support for Fascism. Various struggles over labor or political rights have depended on strong organizations, and often strong leaders, to attain specific goals that largely benefited members, e.g. recognition of unions and collective bargaining, rights to vote, civil rights etc. In the 1960s, a number of social movements flourished beginning with civil rights that would in principle, benefit the entire society. There was major opposition to the war in Viet Nam. Many youth opted for the countercultural lifestyles of

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<sup>2</sup> Some people, including Weber, suggested that the Reformation and emergence of Protestant States with autonomous congregations paved the way to Westphalia and in turn nationalist movements.

<sup>3</sup> Locke’s Second Treatise on Government remains the starting point for this appeal.

<sup>4</sup> Recall that for Marx, the French peasants supporting Louis Napoleon, without access to information, were like potatoes in a sack.

<sup>5</sup> See Markoff (1996). Note that 19<sup>th</sup> C. socialism was fundamentally democratic, unlike is 20<sup>th</sup> C. practices.

<sup>6</sup> Early “civic” nationalisms were typically democratic; later, “integral” nationalisms have been more authoritarian

the “hippies” - drugs, sex and rock and roll. The new social movements (NSMs) and identity politics of postindustrial society focused on demands for new forms of emancipation such as supporting civil rights and valorizing identities of minorities, advancing feminism, sexual freedom (contraception/abortion rights), ecology, gay rights, etc. Such movements often used *television* quite adroitly.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most important social mobilizations of the present age consists of numerous alternative globalization movements. There is now a growing literature that has addressed various contentious transnational mobilizations, demonstrations and movements, typically initiated by various NGOs, INGOs and/or transnational advocacy networks devoted to a number of issues. (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Tarrow 2001; Smith 2002)<sup>8</sup>. Some of these organizations are long-standing; some NGOs and INGOs devoted to issues of rights, justice, environment etc. date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> C. (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Some are more recent and have emerged when political systems provided opportunities for various NGOs or advocacy groups (Smith, 2002). But what must be noted, is that the rise of the Internet, as new communication media, has enabled new means of transmitting information and communication that has in turn enabled new kinds of communities and identities to develop.<sup>9</sup> These new kinds of net based social movements, cyberactivism, is fundamentally new and requires new kinds of theorization.<sup>10</sup>

Markoff (1996) argued that democratic social movements cross national frontiers through replication of social circumstances, transmission of cultural models and the movement of people across frontiers. While these have historically been important factors, Markoff did not address the affects of communication media. All social mobilizations depend on communication media, but *the nature of media has independent consequences*.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, while social movements in earlier periods have depended on media such as the printing press, the telegraph, radio and even television, *the Internet has certain emergent qualities*. Information can now flow across communication networks to allow broad exchanges between large numbers of actors, creating rich possibilities for democratic interaction (Rheingold 1992). *The various alternative globalization/global justice movements (AGM/AJMs) are Internetworked Social Movements (ISMs) that owe their very existence to the Internet*. Information technology thus enables new forms of online social movement actions, cyberactivism and cyberpolitics (Riberio 2003).

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<sup>7</sup> See Gitlin (1980).

<sup>8</sup> These International Non Governmental Organizations are exactly that - not connected with governments, not for profit, and for the most part concerned with humanitarian, environmental, justice, human rights, feminist issues etc. However, they are often funded by governments, and in many cases leaders are highly trained and well paid professionals.

<sup>9</sup> An excellent introduction to the Internet, its history and use by activists: John Naughton,, Contested Space: The Internet and Global Civil Society. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/PDF/Ch6.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> As will be seen, there have been a few people like Castells, Kellner, Calhoun, and Bennett that have taken cognizance of these developments. For a good introduction to cyberactivism, see [http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/soc/courses/soc4jj3\\_99/stuweb/gp9/](http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/soc/courses/soc4jj3_99/stuweb/gp9/)

<sup>11</sup> See Langman (2003a).

Today, the significant political struggles that resist and contest neo-liberal globalization are mediated across electronic networks that allow unprecedented opportunities for the exchange of information *outside of the control of the dominant media corporations* (Kellner 2004). Electronic communication media have unique capacities to create democratic, participatory realms in cyberspace devoted to information and debates. Electronically mediated participation has created conditions for the emergence of new kinds of highly fluid “mobilizing structures” that tend to be far less structured, with fluid networks that are more open and participatory, and are articulated across a wide variety of issues. *These movements cannot easily be understood within existing frameworks* (See however Langman et als, 2003a). They are qualitatively different from the NGOs, INGOs or trans-national advocacy networks that may have embraced the Internet. These AGM/AJM mobilizations owe their existence to the Internet and specifically target various injustices and adversities engendered by neo-liberal global capitalism. Thus FMG, genocide, hunger, or slavery are odious injustices, yet they long antedate contemporary globalization. On the other hand, the modern transnational sex trade, the growing inequality and rural poverty, or deforestation for the sake of fast food burgers are direct consequences of contemporary neo-liberal globalization. In practice, the AGM/AJMs often do target certain long-standing injustices and adversities that have mushroomed due to globalization - greater inequality, growing hunger, exploited labor, the repression and exploitation of workers or women, undemocratic governance and human rights abuses including torture. Many new problems have rapidly grown, such as the AIDS epidemic.<sup>12</sup> Global warming has accelerated as well as rampant environmental despoilment and many species are endangered-including humanity itself. Many such injustices are results of repressive State policies that sustain corporate profits while remaining indifferent to labor abuses or a thriving sex trade. In response, we have seen the emergence and proliferation of democratic, popular resistance in the AGMs or AJMs.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the growing interest and literature in these movements, the historically specific differences between ISMs and earlier movements have not yet been fully theorized within social movement theory, which has attempted to employ paradigms that emerged in earlier contexts. Nor has much social theory in general addressed some of the more salient aspects of *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) and the kinds of electronically mediated connections, networks, communities and identities that have emerged<sup>14</sup>. *The new realities of “network society” mandate rethinking social mobilization*. In the last few years, with the rise of an electronically networked society, we have seen the emergence of democratic ISMs, “network armies” with a distinctly global orientation (Castells 1996, 2002; Hunter 2002; Sassen 1998; Langman et als, 2004). Computer-proficient organizers have become highly skilled in the use of the Internet to enable new forms of “internetworking.” New forms of fluid “mobilizing

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<sup>12</sup> AIDS was not “caused” by globalization per se, but with the ease and low cost of foreign travel, sex tourism has spread, while efforts to halt the spread and/or treat the affliction have been wanting.

<sup>13</sup> While these movements are sometimes call “anti-globalization” movements, most do not oppose globalization as such, but only its neo-liberal form. While there are some few “romantic” anarchists that would dismantle any and all forms of globalization, that is quite unrealistic. The term “*global justice movements*” (GJMs) has been used for a long time and is quite generally accepted.

<sup>14</sup> See Bennett (2003).

structures” enable various moments of “cyberactivism”: mobilizations and political actions such as consumer boycotts, “hactivism” (the electronic bombarding of a corporate or governmental website), or organizing and calling for a protest demonstration. *The global reach of contemporary transnational social movements, especially the extent to which they depend on the Internet for the diffusion of information, communication and co-ordination, requires locating such movements in the larger context of a globalized “network society” located within a fluid modernity.*

The elements for a theory of contemporary movements are present. For example, Wellman (2003) has shown the material consequences of virtual interconnectivity and the “reality” of internetworked communities. Calhoun (20 ) has been among the pioneers theorizing the impact of these new technologies and the kinds of communities “without propinquity that emerge in cyberspace” that can have major social import. The most comprehensive attempt to theorize these trends remains Castells’ (1996-97), who argued that CMC and certain kinds of mediated social networks are essential ingredients of the “network society.” Yet that work had been completed before the full realization of the power of the Internet. Kellner (2002) has long theorized media from the tradition of Critical Theory and has noted the potentials of new communication technologies for progressive mobilization (Best and Kellner 1991; Kahn and Kellner 2003). The work of Dyer-Witheford (1999) should also be noted. Finally, given recent theorization of Urry (2000) and Bauman (2000), Sheller (2003) has argued that theories of networks, fluidity and flows have important implications for social movement theories.

Today one must also consider how social movements engage in both the literal motion of bodies and things through space and with the ‘virtual mobilities’ afforded by new information and communication technologies. In what ways are the use of ‘fluid’ discourses, organizational forms, and action tactics in contemporary ‘global’ movements related to the changing context of liquidity, ambiguity, and diffuse risk. (Sheller 2003, p2.)

Most social movement theories stress either agency or structure; “rational” agents frame reality and recruit followers, or political systems present opportunities or constraints for “mobilizing structures” (social movement organizations) to flourish or wane. Moreover, the “value neutrality” of most social theory avoids a critical stance toward capitalism. *Global capitalism is a system of domination that depends on the exploitation of workers and externalization of the indirect costs of production* (pollution, worker injuries, etc). In theorizing AGMs/AJMs, we must be sensitive to the role of media and communication. As will be argued, Critical Theory has a long history of dealing with the multiple levels of analysis, media, and crises of legitimacy that inform contemporary social movements. Nevertheless, this tradition requires elaboration to embrace the present age of global capital and its advanced technologies such as the Internet.

## PART I THEORIZING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The AGMs are quite different from the **crowds** that stormed the Bastille or invaded the Winter palace and shaped the early modern theories of “irrational mobs” (Tarde,

LeBon).<sup>15</sup> Nor do the local or national unionization or suffrage movements much aid us today. Moreover, as shall be argued, the social movement theories of the '60s and '70s, while providing us with important tools and concepts, cannot fully explain the more flexible, democratic kinds of movements that are dependent on **computer technologies**. CMC enables “virtual public spheres” and new kinds of fluid networks, identities, and the kinds of social mobilization that can be better understood as flows than formal organizations. Critical Theory, as an emancipatory discourse that located alienation, injustice and immiseration in the rationalized, reified, commodified culture of modern capitalism, provides a comprehensive framework for a theory of social mobilization dealing with multiple crises of legitimacy in the context of capitalist globalization, new forms of communication and new forms of organization.

### **A. Perspectives on Social Movements**

Throughout the twentieth century, various efforts have been made to understand the structure, development, mobilization, leadership and qualities of social movements. But theories useful at certain historical moments may have less explanatory value at other times. Nevertheless, valuable insights can be gleaned from earlier kinds of social movements and theoretical frameworks such as resource mobilization (RM), political process, social constructionist (framing), and new social movement theories. Such insights can be subsumed within a Critical Theory to understand the liquidity (Sheller, 2003) of what will be called “Internetworked Social Movements” (ISMs) that act like “smart mobs” (Rheingold 2002) organized into “network armies” (Hunter 2002).

**Resource Mobilization:** When “nice” middle-class youth, sons and daughter of elites, including professors, participated in progressive social movements, such youth were considered rational agents calculating the costs and rewards of participation (Zald and McCarthy 1987). But the RM framework considered the existence of adversities a constant given; “social movement entrepreneurs” called attention to problems to recruit and mobilize followers and create or enlarge social movement organizations (SMOs). But ***certain stresses and adversities have indeed been historically variable and context dependent***, e.g. the consequences of neo-liberal globalization - growing global inequality, labor injustices from child labor to the sex trade, exploitation and the oppression of women, global warming, human rights abuses, etc. But RM tended to downplay the role of ideology both for those whose policies result in social adversities and for those who would foster ameliorative social movements. Contemporary AGMs tend to be more open, fluid and democratic; leaders are more like cheerleaders than directors. Finally, the tendency for transnational advocacy networks, SMOs and INGOs, often located in different continents, to exchange information and strategies and even forge alliances is unprecedented.

**Framing and Meaning Construction:** Recognizing that an individual’s decision to participate in a movement is not simply the result of an objective, disaffected cost-benefit analysis, Snow et al (1986) adopted Goffman’s theory of frame alignment to describe the social-psychological processes by which movements connect with potential participants and build coalitions. Groups attempt to frame issues in ways that explain the basis of

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<sup>15</sup> The conservative bias of such interpretations is self-evident.

adversity, offer visions of a desirable world, and suggest strategies. The success of a movement depends in part on developing a belief system that resonates with potential participants and encourages them to join in. Gamson (1992) noted that the framing process is one of meaning construction; grievances and motivations are defined, linked, and critically extended to form collective identity, solidarity, and the consciousness or critical awareness of movement actors.

While framing, for Snow et al, was more or less a one-way communication from movement (organization, leader or consensus) to participant, Klandermans (1992) broadened the framing perspective to include the interconnectedness of networking and the influence of media discourse. Frames could be aligned from participant to participant, organization to media, media to participant, etc. Framing theory provides useful insight to the social-psychological processes underpinning the connection of the movement to the individual, and thus it is a key tool for understanding contemporary movements. However, like RM theory, it refers more to the social movements of generations past, with formal organizations, structures, leadership and platforms that the current AGM/AJMs.

***Political Process:*** Writing in the wake of the fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe, Tarrow (1998) noted both the historical diversity of social movements and the emergent transnational dynamic of contention. For Tarrow, the emergence of a social movement requires both agency on the part of challengers and opportunities for mobilization, provided by the political structures of the state. Political process theory holds that movements are shaped by, and their potential for success constrained by, the political contexts in which they occur. States may repress, accommodate or co-opt a movement; a movement may encounter a power elite divided amongst itself, or a united front or a state weakened by military defeat or bankruptcy. Movements may benefit from influential allies within the elite. In any event, the agency of a movement, and that of individuals within it, is limited by its status outside of the power structure. It is the task of a movement to build its constituency by framing issues and providing “mobilization structures” that allow sympathizers to become participants. These structures include the formal organizations of the movement, informal relationships between followers, and organizing actions or protests.

Tarrow’s concept of “mobilization structures” is helpful in analyzing the new internetworked social movements. However, political process theory is problematic vis-à-vis ISMs because 1) it presumes concrete political goals and interactions on the part of a movement, and 2) “mobilization structures” are defined by a traditional view of networks that is now outdated. Tarrow acknowledges the presence of Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) transnational advocacy networks but specifically differentiates them from social movements because, in his view, CMC does not provide “interpersonal *social* networks” (1998 p. 189; emphasis in original). Limiting social networks to direct, face-to-face interactions ignores electronic mediations and virtual interactions.

***New Social Movements:*** New social movement theories specifically address the conditions for the emergence of collective identity formation and collective action in

contemporary information society. These theories have emerged in response to changes in the goals, strategies and constituencies of social movements emerging in late capitalist society. Although social movements still pursue political and social gains, more central to NSMs is the construction and legitimation of collective identities for coherence and to articulate resistance. Often, NSMs carry out organization and resistance on symbolic or cultural grounds more so than through traditional political channels. The organizing base of NSMs has been theorized as more dispersed, diverse, fluid and complex in structure than the more defined and fixed structures of previous movement organizations (e.g., labor movements). Further, NSMs generally value participatory democratic relations and decentralized forms of organization (Castells 1997; Melucci 1996); these two factors combine to create more informal, submerged networks than those of past movements.

The emergent internetworked social movements share many of these characteristics; however, *the influence of new technology on mediation has created a new type of movement that requires new theoretical examination*. To understand contemporary internetworked movements, it is necessary to have a social movement model that connects identity, ideology, and network formation to understand how collective action may be mobilized via CMC. The NSMs were grounded in the resistance of the middle class to the rationalizing force of modernity, social fragmentation, injustices, and the importance of recognition. NSM theory speaks to the cultural critique of the Frankfurt School.

**Frankfurt School:** The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory emerged in the context of Fascist mobilizations. Fromm (1941) suggested that stresses fostered by economic and/or political strains and dislocations or cultural challenges to meanings might foster anxieties over adaptation, group belonging and/or value systems that had differential psychological impact. Given economic collapse, the impotence of the Weimar government and the modernist cultures of art (expressionism, cabaret), there were a number of crises. Authoritarian, repressed character structures sustaining a conformist identity, typically found in the lower middle classes, were disposed to submission to power and domination over subordinates and thus had an “elective affinity” with reactionary political mobilizations. The Nazis, aided by film and radio propaganda laden with psychic appeals of a charismatic leader, projecting blame to scapegoats, offered promises of empowerment, restored dignity, and escaping anxiety through group membership in the Nation as an object of reverence. This inspired mass mobilizations.

In the years following WWII, these early insights informed a “multi-dimensional,” “multi-perspectival” critical social theory of “a rationally administered” capitalist society, pacified by “culture industries” that “fostered artificial needs” gratified in a consumerism that blunted Critical Reason (Marcuse 1964; Kellner 1989). Notwithstanding, a number of social movements from the Beat Generation of writers to the French Situationists have been seen as reactions against the sterile conformity of an “administered society,” soothed by the unending spectacles and “repressive desublimations” of its “culture industry.” Many of the social movements of the ‘60s were



reactions to the dominant culture and/or its imperial war in Viet Nam. Indeed, Marcuse was made an honorary guru of the New Left and counter-cultural movements.

Habermas (1962[1989]) pointed out the role of print media in fostering communication and debates within the bourgeois “public spheres” of civil society, those realms of organization and interaction located between the newly privatized family and the larger political economy. Here Enlightenment ideas of the rights of man (sic), popular sovereignty, republicanism and democratization would be discussed, debated and consensus negotiated by participants. At the same time, these spaces encouraged new forms of associations and alliances, and turn, new political identities. These spaces for emancipatory discourses and critiques of injustice by the bourgeoisie in its liberal stage delegitimated dynastic rule and inspired contentious movements that would lead to revolutions, parliamentary democracies, constitutional monarchies, the independence of colonies and support for human rights.

As we have seen, one problem with most social movement theory has been **exclusive** concern with either structural or individual factors. One of the most important legacies of Critical theory was the concern with *both* the *individual* and the *structural*, and the mediating processes between them, of which the most important were identification and the structuring of the superego, and the role of media in fostering emotions and action. While these concerns shaped their early perspectives on Nazi propaganda and postwar consumerism, little was said about the interpersonal processes. Habermas made communication, both through media and in face-to-face discussions central aspects of identity and social action.

## PART II GLOBALIZATION AND ADVERSITY

From what has been said, a theory of contemporary AGMs/GJMs, as ISMs, need to consider 1) historically specific forms of *domination*, typically mystified by ideologies, that thwart human freedom, community and self constitution; and 2) various *injustices, adversities, hardships and insults* to specific groups such as workers, social activists, women, racial and/or gender orientation minorities, humanity in general, other living species, and the ecological balance of the planet.

### **1 *Globalization, Domination and Ideology***

Globalization is an extensively debated topic with little consensus over its nature, meaning and implications. Scholars offer different explanations of the causes and consequences of contemporary globalization.<sup>16</sup> Some give primacy to the political economy and provide materialist explanations for the emergence of a new class of dominant elites, a transnational capitalist class (Sklair 2001). The material foundation of globalization is said to be “techno-capital,” the fusion of advanced technologies and

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<sup>16</sup> There are debates as to whether globalization began 5,000 years ago,, 500 years ago, or after WWII. Some contend that it does not even exist. Held (1999) has argued for a more gradualist stance, that while certain aspects, especially advanced technologies and Internet communication, are new, many features of globalization were present in the 19<sup>th</sup> C.

information systems connecting nodules of a deterritorialized market, decoupled from territorial Nation States (Cf Kellner 1989). Today, the majority of products and services are financed, produced or distributed by large transnational corporations (TNCs) whose “global reach” and global brands now extend to most of the populated world (Klein 1999; Sklair 2001). Capitalist globalization has been called an “Empire” that is now opposed by only one force, the multitudes (Hardt and Hardt 2000). For others, globalization was a consequence of State policy, whether Ferdinand financing Columbus’ journeys, colonial charters or the expansion of American business after WWII (Held 1999). Globalization has eroded state boundaries as goods, information, ideas and even masses of people move freely across the world. Still others emphasize the increasingly important role of electronic media and cultural forces in shaping global relations (Waters 1995; Sassen 1998; Escobar 2000). With the concentration of mass media and the “space-time compression” of the modern world, there have been radical transformations of culture, consciousness and identity (Harvey 1990; Giddens 1991).

The *legitimizing ideology* of globalization - the justifications for globalization that are embraced and extolled by the transnational elites - is neo-liberalism, the notion that regulations by national governments over commerce, tariffs, wages etc. distort market forces and adversely impact corporate profits. As a corollary, governmental services should be both scaled back in scope and privatized to provide more capital for investment purposes. While there may be short-term “structural adjustments,” in the long run, all will prosper. Globalization has created vast, if highly concentrated, profits. Yet for most people, globalization in its neo-liberal form has a number of adverse consequences (Dicken 1998; Sklair 2001; Starr 2000).

The *hegemonic ideology* of globalization is consumerism that secures legitimacy and the “willing consent” of the multitudes via a commodified mass culture and its advertising, which promotes “fantastic” consumer-based identities and enjoyable consumer-based lifestyles (Langman 1992; Klein 1999; Sklair 2001).<sup>17</sup> A now-globalized “culture industry” presents unending spectacles and carnivals that privilege privatized hedonism or pleasant escapism. While the political economy fosters domination, consumerism renders adversities invisible while globalization seem “normal,” “natural” and operating in the “best interests” of all by providing the “goods” life. The “culture industry” of today provides erotic, transgressive carnivals and dreamworlds and phantasmagorias of primary process devoted to the “pleasure principle” that have eroded Critical Reason dependent on the secondary processes of the “reality principle” (Marcuse 1964; Langman 2004b).

## **2 The Adverse Consequences of Globalization.**

As has been suggested, the globalized production of the goods, services and entertainment that provides vast corporate profits has had onerous social consequences. Notwithstanding the “joys of shopping,” many of the consumer goods, from clothes to electronics, are produced in inhumane third world sweatshops by often exploited and oppressed women workers. Some of the pornography of the Internet is dependent on

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<sup>17</sup> For the present purposes, a legitimizing ideology

coercive practices of the global sex trade. Meanwhile, between factories, power stations and transportation-generated CO<sub>2</sub>, global warming proceeds unabated. While for schematic purposes five such consequences can be noted, in practice these often overlap. For example, young women may be sexually exploited to gain/keep a job in a polluting enterprise without rights or political recourse.

- a) **Economic:** Globalization in its current neo-liberal form has generated massive amounts of wealth as well as massive redistributions of wealth from the poor to the rich as “corporations now rule the world” (Perucci and Wysong 2002; Korten 2001). Social welfare programs have been gutted in developing nations and increasingly in developed nations in the service of neo-liberal doctrines of structural adjustment (Teeple 1995).
- b) **Political:** Globalization has led to an erosion of the autonomy of State policy, and with the invisibility of many global policies, there is little citizen awareness and in turn, little impact by citizens in traditional voter circumstances. Transnational firms and agencies (WTO, IMF, World Bank) increasingly dictate trade policies, tariff rates, investment laws, copyrights, labor conditions, etc.
- c) **Cultural:** There has been a growing concentration of the means of communication, a universalization of homogenized popular culture and transformation of news into entertainment (Bagdakian 1997; McChesney 2000). Media-fostered consumerism increasingly serves the political and economic interests of globalization by providing media spectacles and forms of subjectivity and cultural identification apart from political economy (Langman 1992).
- d) **Environmental:** There has been vast environmental despoliation, destruction of ecosystems, deforestation, the loss of many species, and the definition of genetically modified organisms as a social problem (Kovel, 2002; Foster, 2002).
- e) **Human Rights:** Many types of human rights/ global social justice movements have arisen since the sixties with greater awareness of oppression, torture, and murder as a State or State-tolerated practice in non-democratic societies.<sup>18</sup> In many places, governments repress if not murder union organizers or civil libertarians. Race, gender and gender preference-based oppressions ranging from genocide in Sudan, FGM or rape as punishment endure. Meanwhile a mass sex trade has flourished, often involving children. These issues of social justice have complex interactions with class, State politics, national cultures and religion. Insofar as these problems now cross national boundaries, so too must and have various NGOs and associated social movements taken a transnational course

These dysfunctions, at structural as well as experiential levels, *foster crises of legitimacy*. At this point the fundamental theoretical question asks how multiple levels of crisis become social mobilizations. The mediations between injustice and adversity, which are

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<sup>18</sup> It was only when digital photos of the abuses of Abu Ghraib went out over the Internet that these practices became known outside of human rights organizations.

often far removed from personal experience, and actual participation in a social movement depend on a number of factors: 1) information and the way it is framed; 2) a personal identity that is receptive to this information; 3) a structural location conducive to activism; and 4) linkages or ties with networks of social actors with similar concerns. This is not sequential; it can often work in many directions, e.g. activists, those with more flexible work schedules and typically more educated, are more likely to be exposed to certain information. For various reasons, some people that are either directly impacted by dysfunctions and hardships, or have awareness and empathy with others who face adversities, are likely to seek out means of amelioration. In other cases, people in certain structural locations are more likely to be exposed to certain information and/or experiences.

***The problems generated by globalization transcend national boundaries and cannot be addressed by national actors***; therefore, new kinds of global social movements are necessary to meet the new kinds of challenges (Cf. Bennett, 2003). We can suggest that for theorizing AGMs, given adversities, injustices, and suffering, that 1) some people, ***informed by media***, become recruited by self or others to form or join networks and organizations. They are often engaged via a computer terminal, often located in ***“virtual public spheres”*** where people can freely attempt to create and negotiate understandings, “consensual truths” and critiques, propose alternative imaginaries and explore various strategies to realize these goals. As a result, 2) ***“Internetworked Social Movements”*** (ISMs) of various kinds have emerged, with often contentious relations to States. Some provide alternative information, others initiate various kinds of actions that might contest, resist and even transform adversities and injustices through pressures on States and/or economic actors to change policies or, in some cases, change governments. These might include lobbying, consumer boycotts, demonstrations, and even direct forms of “netwar” such as “hactivism.”

## PART II TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF ISMs

Habermas (1989) argued that in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Cs, printed books and pamphlets, and letters provided wide access to the ideas, critiques and social imaginaries of the Enlightenment and the project of modernity. People gathered together in the bourgeois “public spheres” located in salons, pubs, restaurants, and even the foyers of symphony and opera halls to discuss, clarify, debate and negotiate interpersonally constructed, undistorted consensual truths regarding dynastic rule, inalienable rights, popular sovereignty etc. The rise of bourgeois “public spheres” and modern bourgeois identities as rational, empowered agents seeking democratic, “imagined” political communities led to plans and strategies to realize the alternative social imaginaries of democratic Nation-States.

Following his concern with the move toward democratic internationalism, given the earlier legacies of Critical Theory, he formulated his theory of legitimation crises. Some political movements were reactionary. The post-WWI economic problems and political weakness of the Weimar government led to riots and instability; meanwhile, the

cosmopolitan culture of Berlin affronted lower middle class tastes. Between Hitler's charismatic appeal to authoritarian personalities, brilliant use of then-new mass media, and funding by industrial and land-owning elites (Junkers), the Nazi party gained electoral victories and Hitler was asked to form a government. Much like Louis Napoleon, he then took total control of the State. Given this history, Habermas (1975) formulated a comprehensive theory of legitimacy crises fostering social mobilizations.

Social crises, stresses and strains at economic, political, cultural or motivation-identity levels, mediated through locally situated interpersonal networks, could migrate from one sector to another. While the directions of chains of influence are variable, in most cases, crises in political or economic spheres have differential impact on people at given social location and within that location. Variations in identity associated with gender, in some cases race/ethnicity, and individual psychological differences impact the consequences of events and their understandings. Identity-motivation has a crucial role in social mobilization; for example, an economic or political change, or anticipated change, may bring some people advantages and other people losses that might impel them to organize and act. Those potentially advantaged would tend to support the status quo, while those burdened might 1) passively accept a new status, especially if understood through a hegemonic ideology; 2) they might seek to retreat or withdraw from the adverse circumstances; or finally, 3) they might come together, discuss their plight, attempt to understand their circumstances, and attempt transformation.<sup>19</sup>

With the growth of capital, the rational interests of the system increasingly colonized the life world and there were fundamental conflicts between Enlightenment-based Critical Reason, emancipatory interests and the clerically sustained dynastic rule. New understandings debated in the "public spheres" led to various revolutions and democratic transformations. But with late capital, the commodification of culture that has fostered privatized, hedonistic identities and narcissistic withdrawals of self from political or social concerns has attenuated civil society. The "public sphere" was displaced by escapist fantasies while mass-mediated consumerism colonized desire and consciousness. But meanwhile, given the growing demands for goods and energy resources to maintain this kind of society and its consumption-based identities, there have been increasing stresses, strains, dislocations and adversities that would impel crises of legitimacy and in turn foster social mobilizations.

Habermas, in the tradition of Rousseau and Dewey, has staunchly defended "the project of modernity," with democratic practices and governance supporting universal standards of social justice, mediated through participatory, public discourses culminating in a cosmopolitan constitutionalism. Progressive social movements have played a central role in advancing the project of modernity by empowering actors engaged in democratic practices. Habermas's framework, informed by identity-network theorists like Castells (1996, 1997, 1998, 2002) and Melucci (1996), suggests that globalization has led to similar kinds of injustices and adverse conditions in diverse areas of the world. But given the Internet, an essential part of "network society," there is now nearly instantaneous

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<sup>19</sup> In some ways, this typology is somewhat like Merton's classical model of conformity, retreatism, innovation, rebellion or retreatism.

transmission of information and ideas that virtually eliminate the necessity of physical movement across national borders.

Informed by the legacies of the Frankfurt School, we would however suggest that while their analyses must be our starting point for understanding contemporary social movements in the global era, given new technologies, we need to revise that analysis.<sup>20</sup> Just as there were radical transformations of capital as it moved from the liberal to industrial era, so too has modern capital embraced computer- based technologies of control and communication to become a globalized system of deterritorialized networks of control and command of production and distribution. And so too there are new forms of domination, alienation and exploitation that invite resistance and overcoming. Yet the new economic or political forms of alienation, domination or episodic crises of legitimacy can now be discussed and critiqued in the “virtual public spheres” where people attempt to interpret and understand crises, injustices and adversities in order to envision alternatives and map strategies. In the processes of such negotiations there are conditions for the establishment of and/or confirmation of progressive identities as projects to be realized (see below Pp xx). The electronic networks and virtual “public spheres” link individuals to ISMs and ISMs to each other. Resistance networks of social movements based on the powers of flows (information, capital or people) act as a defense against the placeless logic of the space of flows characterizing social domination in the information age (Castells 1997. p.: 358).

### ***1 Electronic Media and “Virtual Public Spheres”***

The development of CMC has been an essential moment of contemporary globalization that has allowed the command, coordination and control of the globalized, deterritorialized system of banking, finance, production, transportation and distribution to be decoupled from Nation-States. Each day trillions of dollars of sales, investments and financial speculations flow through fiber-optic networks (Sassen 1998). ***But this same technology has also enabled the emergence of tens of thousands of interconnected transnational NGOs, INGOs, advocacy networks, democratic grass root organizations and globally oriented social movements that have led to episodic mass mobilizations of resistance.***<sup>21</sup>

Media has long played an essential role in social movements, communicating news, ideas, theories and analyses of the causes of injustice or discontent and providing information and frames. Media has been used by movements in devising and planning strategies, coordinating with other groups, and hopefully impacting broader publics and/or elites and thus impacting State policies. The rise of bourgeois “public spheres,” which created places and communities for the fostering and articulation of modern bourgeois identities as rational, empowered agents seeking democratic “imagined”

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<sup>20</sup> Some critics have suggested that Castells view of “network society” echoes the analysis of the Frankfurt School, which is perhaps why this paper has depended on his work.

<sup>21</sup> The NGOs and Transnational advocacy groups tend to be more organized than the more movement-oriented AGMs/AJMs. They are more likely to receive funding from foundations or governments. There is an emerging NGO elite. The movements tend to have few leaders, little in the way of organizational structures, yet coalitions of these movements can mobilize hundreds of thousands of people, indeed the massive world wide protest to the invasion of Iraq totaled over 20 million people

political communities, foreshadowed current AGM/AJM mobilizations. Today the “virtual public spheres” depend on CMC, while the communication processes are quite accelerated and globally dispersed. Rheingold (1995) has called these virtual communities, “communities of interest facilitated by computer networks” and has suggested that there are perhaps tens of thousands such communities oriented to civil society. But he raises a question, do such groups portend revitalizing civil institutions via communication, or do they create an illusion of action without any real impact. As will be argued, in the decade since he raised this question, we have seen these communities morph into powerful actors in today’s world.

The [current] nature of the Internet has important implications for democratic contestations and mobilizations against neo-liberal globalization. Kellner (2004) notes:

“Radical democratic politics can use new technologies to intervene within the global restructuring of capitalism to promote democratic and anti-capitalist social movements, [to foster] globalization-from below aiming at radical social transformation...[to achieve] cosmopolitan internationalism, social justice, workers and human rights, environmental protection, the reconstruction of education, social justice and a diverse range of issues intending to help create a better world. The Internet is (for now) one of the few realms left where one can find spaces not yet commodified in the ultracommodified world of technocapitalism.” (Kellner 2004).<sup>22</sup>

The Internet and its architecture has provided relatively low-cost, easy-access and far-reaching networks, dispersed across the globe, that provide flows of vast amounts of information. Decentralized nodules along communication networks are easily created, constructed and rhizomatically spread to deterritorialized “virtual public spheres”- cyber salons, cafes and meeting places in cyberspace where people and information intersect in virtual communities or subcultures (Wellman, 1999, 2003). The communities that are organized in cyberspace are just as real to the participants as face to face relationships. Here people can gain or provide information as well as debate and negotiate interpretations of reality and/or critiques of the social. Such interactions foster and/or recognize new forms of identity (see below) whose performative expressions include organizing actions and using the Net to coordinate with other groups. Cyberspace has have been easily adapted and embraced as an essential aspect of resistance struggles, beginning with news forums, interactive websites and/or personal weblogs (blogs).<sup>23</sup>

Electronic communication, whether via computers, wireless PDAs or text messages between cell phones, has created new forms of relatively facile information transmission, communication, coordination and connections between social actors that has in turn enabled new kinds of social mobilizations not tied to specific locales. Anyone anywhere having access to a terminal, or even a handheld phone or PDA with Internet capability, can provide information to anyone else as often as events take place. S/he can contribute to a thread (online discussion) and make his/her opinion known. Various websites, blogs, chat groups etc. assume the qualities of “public spheres” where people can find or provide information, debate ideas, develop critiques and envision strategies.

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<sup>22</sup> This, of course, is changing as corporations make more and more inroads into cyberspace.

Indymedia.com, an alternative-media website, often has several million hits a day. *Logos*, the progressive online journal, gets 150,000 hits per month.

Further, whereas earlier social movements depended on face-to-face interaction and leadership structures etc., for the ISMs, much of the information, analyses, meanings and understandings come through the Internet. There are comparatively fewer face-to-face, person-to-person interactions, but at certain times, millions of people can participate in some way.<sup>24</sup> The “many to many” nature of the Internet enables large numbers of people to circumvent costly, constricted, controlled corporate-owned media (Rhiengold 1992).<sup>25</sup> This is highly conducive to decentralized, democratic participation. “Leadership,” if it could be called that, is typically more fluid and ephemeral, more democratic. These movements, as responses to injustice, domination and immiseration, assume a variety of emancipatory forms; some are radical, some progressive, some humanistic and some simply liberal.<sup>26</sup> But in practice, there is often a great deal of coordination between these mobilizations. Most movement websites include a number of linkages to similar endeavors.

The vast majority of Internet sites are *not* concerned with advancing progressive change, contesting of global capital, or fostering an emancipatory agenda to realize the project of modernity. (The commodification of cyberspace ironically protects against State interventions that might also threaten commerce.) The essential point is not the relatively small number of progressive sites and users, but the fact that the medium has enabled unprecedented numbers to have access to progressive agendas. While more shall be said, it must be noted that *while these virtual public spheres are essential, there must also be concrete social interactions, solidarity-affirming gatherings*. Thus demonstrations, marches, lobbying, and - as will be noted - meetings and forums that provide face-to-face meetings are a sine quo non of any transformational agenda.<sup>27</sup>

## ***2. Collective Identities and Social Movements***

An identity is a reflexive narrative that makes a group and/or an individual unique, distinct from others. This may be based on lineage, religion, lifestyle and/or political orientations. For the individual, a self-identity both incorporates the person into a group and renders him/her unique. Self-identities are not simply reflexive narratives, but are emotionally anchored; this provides an impetus to action and a commitment to sustain performative expressions of self. Self-identities provide emotional satisfactions

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<sup>24</sup> At the time of the Genoa protests, this author and Craig Calhoun posted a short note to Indymedia. [http://indymedia.org/front.php3?article\\_id=56991](http://indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=56991) There were 12 million hits that day.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to ignore the “digital divide” between and within countries, but we now see a majority of the people in advanced societies with Internet access and email addresses. Further, even in poorer countries, there are community centers that enable access.

<sup>26</sup> We should note that there are number of more traditional and often authoritarian versions of leftist, progressive agendas that still valorize a vanguard party controlling a dictatorship, in the name of the proletariat, that tended in practice to be dictatorships *over* the proletariat. Such movements represent an earlier era, and may just not be possible in a networked society in which there are numbers of actors and the only way any can impact either state policy and/or actual lives is through coalitions.

<sup>27</sup> This is not to ignore various net-based activities from hacking to culture jamming, but these do not usually make for major political change.



and/or anxiety reduction through membership in a community that grants recognition, provides a sense of agency, and gives one a basis for meaning (Giddens 1991; Langman 2000).

With the growth of capitalism and consequent rise of civil society there were challenges to traditional, ascriptive identities based largely on birth and inheritance of landed wealth, e.g. lord and serf (Baumeister 1986). The growing Italian bourgeoisie wished to create and articulate their own identity through the control of their “own” culture based on the Renaissance rebirth of traditional Roman culture, refashioned to valorize humanism, perspectivism in art and vernacular literature. Eventually, as the bourgeoisie grew more numerous, affluent and powerful, and widely diffused, given the “elective affinity” between their rational business practices with methodological approaches to everyday life and Protestantism, they would challenge the power of the Church-State elites as well as seek to disenchant the world. Later, with the rise of “public spheres,” they would meet to debate and critique of the ideas of emancipatory moments of the Enlightenment. In that process, new forms of democratic, citizen-based identities were created, negotiated and articulated. The traditional domination of dynastic rule was critiqued and eventually challenged by modernist democratic and/or nationalist movements.

In late modern societies, with the pluralization of life worlds, one’s repertoires identities are more likely to be reflexively based on life styles that may be oriented to a progressive future or to traditions based on religion and/or ethnicity (Cf. Giddens 1991). As nationalism has waned and/or been displaced by consumerism, citizenship-based identities have become less salient in the advanced countries.<sup>28</sup> People are more apt to embrace identities that locate themselves in alternative “communities of meaning” ranging from fundamentalist religion to consumption-based lifestyles to the more marginal countercultures and/or fandoms of celebrity. This notwithstanding, the emancipatory moment of modernity, however co-opted, yet endures to inform identity constructions and social mobilizations of dedicated minorities. Moreover, this emancipatory aspect of modern identity can now be found in many parts of the world. The diffusion of cyberactivism has depended on dispersed islands of democratic activism that are even present in authoritarian societies such as Burma, China or much of the Middle East.<sup>29</sup>

Klandermans (1992) has shown that collective identities are essential to contemporary social movements; they provide the individual with an agenic identity based on his/her group identity that disposes certain actions. Melucci (1996) suggested that collective identities emerge within an interactive process in which social networks define their values, the meanings of their actions, and fields of opportunities. Castells (1997) then notes that in the more fluid “network society,” new technologies and forms of online interactions have had major impact in enabling new forms of collective identity

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<sup>28</sup> The post-9/11 consumerism-as-patriotism was a more episodic response than a reversal of a long trend. Within 2 years, following the costs and casualties of invading Iraq, support for war had ebbed.

<sup>29</sup> Moghadam’s (2002) work on Muslim feminists networks clearly shows how wide and far democratic identities can be found.

that are more salient than the more institutional identities of work, citizenship or religion—though of course there are new integrations ranging from liberation theology to progressive third-world feminisms. The realities of globalization foster a variety of identities and agendas. Some folks embrace it, others reject it and retreat to a mythical past, some escape to the dreamworlds of mass culture, and finally some people create and/or negotiate new forms of progressive identities.

Following Castells (1997), network society fosters four types of collective identities: 1) *legitimizing identities* sustaining the social order—typically these have been nationalist, religious, or often both. Today, consumerism and its privatized hedonism and narcissistic indifference to, if not retreat from, the social serves the same functions. 2) *Resistance identities* are attempts to retain or restore identities that oppose globalization and its impacts, generally by turning away from the global to restore a lost “golden age.” These may be progressive albeit romantic and anarchic or reactionary as seen in various anti-modernist fundamentalisms. 3) *Project identities* would attempt to re-negotiate and/or fashion new forms of tolerant democratic identities that in turn act to impel progressive social transformations.<sup>30</sup>

The “virtual public spheres” of a global civil society not only provide information and communication but act as identity-granting subcultures that foster collective identities. The “virtual public spheres” of the Internet enable what Kahn and Kellner (2003), call “post-subcultures”, interpersonal networks of discussion, debate and clarification that, however virtual, nevertheless foster or create spaces for the democratic construction, negotiation and articulation of new constellations of project identities that are decoupled from national, ethnic or religious moorings. These “post-subcultures” allow people the freedom to re-define and construct themselves on the basis of the alternative cultural and/or political forms and experiences. For Castells (1997), various “project identities” are emerging that would renegotiate or re-fashion subjectivity along more progressive, humanistic lines, locating people in more egalitarian communities, free of exploitation and more tolerant of creativity and diversity.

Project identities that evolve in contentious social movements typically resist rationalization and/or commodification. These project identities pose challenges to late capitalist modernity in which rational technologies, as forms of domination, colonize the life world as well as collective identity, child rearing, family life, work, organizational spheres and even the pursuit of pleasure (Giddens 1991, Habermas 1975, Hochschild 1997). Moreover, the global nature of the Internet has fostered a greater awareness of often far-removed injustices and adversities that in turn mobilize ameliorative strategies rooted in political or economic practices. Internet “post-subcultures” have taken up the questions of local and global politics and are attempting to construct globally oriented identities and strategies to act both locally and globally, which are now possible because of nature of the Internet. Social justice movements in general, and the AGM/AJMs in particular, are organized around articulating collective identities that seek to attain some

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<sup>30</sup> Such identities might also include contemporary instantiations of progressive trade unionists, anti-war activists, and human rights activists.

public good(s).<sup>31</sup> Those who acquire a global justice identity through the Internet are more likely to join ISMs. Such identity-based networks impel resistance, contestation and new forms of net-based progressive cyberactivism.<sup>32</sup> These include feminism, gay rights and environmentalism as well as AIDS activism. Other AJMs/AGMs embrace more traditional causes amplified by globalization such as trade unionism, job creation, poverty, inadequate medical services, civil/human rights, genocide, the sex trade, and regional trade agreements (taxes tariffs, migration), landless/homelessness or family violence.

Finally, to Castells' typology, one could add 4) *ludic identities*, which locate subjectivity in the liminal anti-structures of late modern mass culture that privilege privatized hedonistic indulgence<sup>33</sup>. But while most such identities withdraw from the political, some of the contemporary AGMs/AJMs include numbers of more marginal youth whose playful antics, qua bizarre appearances and strange attire, harken back to the Situationists and various forms of street theater and performance art whose grotesque manifestations were the critique of domination (Bakhtin 1968). Such groups played an important role in the 2002 worldwide demonstrations against the impending invasion of Iraq and again in the 2004 presidential election.<sup>34</sup>

### 3) "*Internetworked Social Movements*"

Computer-savvy progressives created "virtual public spheres" in the global networks, providing perspectives on issues that cross national boundaries to address the consequences of globalization on trade policies, labor, pollution and disease. Within certain nations there are often other injustices from the torture of dissidents to state-supported sweatshops and even state-supported sex industries. As noted, the "virtual public spheres" not only provide information often kept secret, but engender progressive "project identities" with shared concerns for social justice that are often expressed in online discussions, understandings, organization and planning of social action. Electronically mediated ISMs as "mobilizing networks" act as "coordinating structures" to organize and coordinate various strategies and tactics of resistance, from email or snail mail campaigns to protest marches and demonstrations, street theater, and even attempts to impact electoral campaigns. These movements are themselves decentralized, democratic and not easily subject to control. The campaigns are often long and protracted, "the networking and mobilizing capacities of these ongoing campaigns makes campaigns, themselves, [the] political organizations that sustain activist networks in the absence of leadership by central organizations" (Bennett, 2003). They are unique forms

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<sup>31</sup> In many cases, membership and participation in a social movement organization serves more to sustain and confirm collective and personal identity than to actually impact policy over what sometimes seem to be intractable adversities. Consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some of the peace activist groups have spent decades trying to foster reconciliation –so far to no avail.

<sup>32</sup> There have been earlier notions of global justice organization, for example the World Federalists. But these tend to be more formal and less likely to engage in protest mobilizations.

<sup>33</sup> Castells did not use this category. While such "ludic" identities may often valorize cultural resistances, e.g. consumer selfhood, body modification, shock rock, WWF fans, rave scenes etc., ludic identities are most likely to withdraw from political action to liminal sites of resistance. (Langman 1992, 2003)

<sup>34</sup> Groups like Punkvoters.com or League of Pissed of Voters (<http://www.indyvoter.org/index.php>) mobilized a number of otherwise marginal types that were unlikely to register/vote. Some however, were pure parody and lampoon such as Fthevote.com that suggested offering sex as an inducement to vote against Bush.

of activist organizations that have a more global orientation and like their own kind of organizations, envision a more just, more democratic world with more diffused, fluid, and egalitarian leadership and empowered people..

In some ways, the AGM/AJMs share the goals and visions of social justice articulated by earlier democratic mobilizations such as the bourgeois critique of dynastic rule and the abolition, unionization, suffrage and civil rights movements. But these mobilizations that now depend on global networks of widely dispersed, progressive activists, portend new “waves of democracy” and democratic participation that go considerably beyond the tactics, strategies and goals of earlier, more locally based, typically more formally structured social movements with more singular immediate goals. These styles of networking differ from traditional kinds of social movement leadership that stress more masculine notions of organization. In Moghadam’s (2000) research on feminist networks in the Middle East, activists used the Internet to create international links between women in Muslim countries and Diaspora communities, to exchange information on their situations (similarities and differences), and to support strategies that strengthen and reinforce women’s initiatives and struggles through various means such as publications, conferences, exchanges, etc. Finally they would support each other’s struggles through various means. She notes:

Transnational feminist networks...offer an alternative to male-dominated political organizations; they are an expression of the political awakening of women; and they exemplify the maturation of feminism and the interaction of women’s activists around the world. Feminist networks have actively responded to adverse global processes, including economic restructuring and the expansion of fundamentalism. They are taking advantage of other global processes, including the development and spread of computer technology. In these efforts, they engage in information exchange, mutual support and a combination of lobbying, advocacy and direct action toward the realization of their goals of equality and empowerment for women and social justice and democratization in the society at large. Leading members of transnational feminist networks are often involved with other international nongovernmental research or advocacy organizations, and they often use those locations as platforms to publicize or otherwise advance the activities of the feminist networks. TFNs seem to have devised an organizational structure that consists of active and autonomous local/national women’s groups but that transcends localisms or nationalisms. Their discourses and objectives are not particularistic but are universalistic. As such, these TFNs are situated in the tradition of progressive modernist politics. (Moghadam 2002)

As Moghadam (2002) notes, network-based movements like the Muslim feminists join together in diverse communities that bring together labor, feminism, ecology, peace, and various anti-capitalist groups. This enables a new politics of alliance and solidarity that overcomes the limitations and solipsism of postmodern identity politics.<sup>35</sup>

While most of the AGM organizations tend themselves to be rather small, their strategies and agenda depend on democratic discussions, deliberations and participation of far greater numbers. Moreover, what makes cyberactivism unique is the ability to form

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<sup>35</sup> The identity politics movements that valorized and celebrated marginal if not stigmatized identities did not interrogate and contest the political economic determinants of recognition and subalterity. See also Best and Kellner (2001); Kahn and Kellner (2003); Burbach (2001); Dyer-Witheford (1999)

instant coalitions and immediate coordination with numerous other progressive groups and organizations to find great power in numbers. Large numbers of interconnected, progressive mobilizing structures, flowing across extremely complex networks of communications, inform widely dispersed constituencies and coordinate activist endeavors. The democratic nature of Internet access has allowed progressive virtual communities to distribute unfettered information and to create alternative “virtual public spheres,” as well as to create alternative globalization organizations and massive gatherings such as World Social Forum (Castells 2001; Langman et al 2003a; Waterman 2004.) This contributes to democratic participation and decision-making in the framing of the injustices and adversities of neo-liberal globalization, formulating strategies of resistance and visions of emancipation and organizing transformation.

There are three ideal-typical kinds of ISMs that are fundamentally new and dependent on and constituted in part by the Internet: 1) *alternative media* providing information not usually available in the mainstream presses; 2) *alternative politics* oriented to global social justice and global peace movements, and 3) *online cyberactivism*, mobilizations organized by and/or on the Internet. While each of these has historical precedents, at the same time, the use of the Internet has had unprecedented implications for democratic process. Consider the emergence of the World Social Forum in which more than 100,000 activists of various stripes gathered in Brazil in 2003 and then in Mumbai in 2004. On Feb 15, 2003, 10 to 15 million people in more than 600 cities protested the then-impending U.S. invasion of Iraq. On April 12, another massive Internet-based anti-war protest was organized. Preliminary analyses have suggested that the Internet lends itself to the emergence of “network armies based on shared values” (Hunter 2002).

#### ***A. Alternative Media.***

The emergence of civil society, replete with its “public sphere,” was an essential moment of bourgeois modernity qua democratic participation and the expansion of human rights and freedoms. While Habermas’ analysis remains the starting point for considering the relationships between media and emancipatory social mobilization, as has been argued, media has radically changed. Hegel announced that modernity was evident when instead of going to church, the day began with reading a newspaper. While at one time newspapers represented a variety of political debates and viewpoints, with the contemporary monopolization of the media and commodification of news, there is ever less diversity. Mainstream news outlets, especially television, have become indistinguishable moments of hegemonic process. Moreover, most people now get their news from television, where simplistic “one-dimensional” sound/site bites reduce all complexity to bumper-sticker platitudes and the personalization of complex social forces.

Insofar as the commodified news outlets tend to be affirmative, supportive of elite views of reality, with the growth of the Internet, we have seen a vast proliferation of alternative news sites that not only report information not covered by the mainstream press, but advocate and indeed either organize or attempt to aid the organizational efforts

of other groups.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the best examples here are Indymedia (IMC), Alternet, Common Dreams, or Take Back the Media<sup>37</sup>. Consider IMC, a more or less (typically less) organized network of collectives in more than 30 countries that report on news, information about various mobilizations/demonstrations, etc. IMC emerged with the Seattle protests against the WTO and quickly spread across the globe.<sup>38</sup> While there is a great deal of diversity, its orientation is basically anarcho-syndicalism. Alternet is site that provides links to a number of current stories found in the press, radical organizations and other news sites. It includes a number of forums.

Perhaps it might be noted that many foreign newspapers such as the Guardian or LeMonde have reputations for objectivity often lacking in mainstream news outlets. For example, at the time of the beginning of the war on Iraq, Web usage jumped. The Guardian reported:

“Traffic to news websites has continued to rise amid signs that users hungry for war reports and analysis are rejecting TV in favor of the Internet. According to web monitoring company Hitwise, traffic to news sites has risen by 6% in the past two weeks following the huge surge that greeted the outbreak of hostilities. While audiences for 24-hour TV news services have dipped as the war progresses, user figures on the Internet have continued to increase. Guardian Unlimited continues to be the most visited newspaper websites.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the news of the day, more extended critiques and analyses are available. For many people, the homogeneous, mainstream corporate media provides little more than entertainment, while the costs of print journalism have become quite prohibitive to left, progressive journals. Mother Jones, Z-Magazine, The Nation, The Progressive and Tikkun etc. each maintain online journals or blogs (see below) available to a wider audience. These forums not only allow for the rapid and wide spread of information about important events, discussions and interchanges, but they become the means through which many of the notables, spokespersons, and public intellectuals such as Arundati Roy, Susan George, Walden Bello, Naomi Klien, Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Jose Bove and others express their views.

## **2. Blogs**

Many individuals or small groups have taken up the task of providing news, information and opinion via blogs, short for weblogs. Blogs are websites of individuals that provide frequent if not daily news, information, commentary, and often linkages to other blogs and Internet sites providing more information. The number of blogs has mushroomed in the past couple of years and indeed a “blogosphere,” a virtual community of bloggers, has emerged. Blogs have been compared to intellectual or political diaries.

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<sup>36</sup> There are, to be sure, a number of factors such as class, ethnicity, family background that dispose certain people to gravitate to such sites; or, more often, individuals are parts of actual social networks that bring people into contact with the virtual networks.

<sup>37</sup> [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org); [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org); [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org); [www.takebackthemedias.com](http://www.takebackthemedias.com)

<sup>38</sup> For a much more comprehensive look at the Internet’s role in the WTO protests, see Kahn & Kellner (2003).

<sup>39</sup> See Owen Gibson <http://media.guardian.co.uk/newmedia/story/0,7496,928229,00.html>

They are highly decentralized and highly democratic and have almost no production costs. "What bloggers do is completely new - and cannot be replicated on any other medium. It's somewhere in between writing a column and talk radio. It's genuinely new. And it harnesses the Web's real genius - its ability to empower anyone to do what only a few in the past could genuinely pull off. In that sense, blogging is the first journalistic model that actually harnesses rather than merely exploits the true democratic nature of the web. It's a new medium finally finding a unique voice."<sup>40</sup>

During the US invasion of Iraq, while the mainstream media told of a glorious victory, Robert Fisk, a British journalist in Baghdad, provided the world with very different information about the death and devastation to the civilian population.<sup>41</sup> In the months following, some of the best information about the actual conditions of Iraq has come from Medea Benjamin and Naomi Klein.<sup>42</sup> For those interested in the Critical theoretical approach of this paper, Douglas Kellner has a blog that notes relevant news, commentary etc.<sup>43</sup> His own website includes many writings, germane to cyberactivism including those cited herein.<sup>44</sup>

### **3. Global Civil societies:**

For Hegel, civil society was the realm of social institutions apart from the economy or the state. A current definition from the global society *Civitas*, Institute for the Study of Civil Society:

The term civil society is intended to emphasize that in social affairs the alternatives to government are not exhausted by commercial services alone. There are also mutual, church and charitable organizations, quite apart from the informal support of neighbors and within the family. The balance between the powers of government and the liberties of the individuals and organizations that make up a society is never resolved and each generation must find its own solution. Today there are still areas where the realm of political decisions may have encroached too much onto the territory best left to the initiative of individuals freely co-operating in their own localities.

There have emerged a large number of such organizations, one of the largest and oldest being OneWorld.net (<http://www.oneworld.net/>), which now has more than 900 member/partner organizations. Others include Civil Society International (<http://www.civilsoc.org/>), Civicus ([www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org)), Choike (<http://www.choike.org/>), and Global Civil Society (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/outline.htm>). These groups provide sources of information and act as sites for debating globalization issues, sponsoring meetings and forums, distributing information from other websites etc. It is best understood as an infrastructure that has developed in response to the anti-democratic nature of globalization and the inequality it has generated; perhaps it can also

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<sup>40</sup> From Andrew Sullivan's blog at <http://www.andrewsullivan.com/culture.php?artnum=20020224>. This site offers an excellent introduction to blogs, blogging and the blogosphere.

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.robert-fisk.com> and <http://www.klm.com/antiwarblog/>

<sup>42</sup> Medea Benjamin's organization, Global Exchange, <http://www.globalexchange.org/index.html>, provides a wealth of information about global capital, daily updates, and an e-list. Naomi Klein, activist-author provides similar information on her website, <http://www.nologo.org/>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/blogger.php>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>

be understood as evidence of the growing connectedness of people throughout the world.<sup>45</sup>

#### ***4 Alternative Professional Networks:***

It is worth mentioning that there have emerged a large number of progressive activist sites that appeal to specific academic constituencies, e.g. Progressive Sociologist Network, Global Studies Association-North America, Sociologists Without Borders, Left Business Observer, Radical Philosophy Association, Radical Historians, Media Workers Against War, etc.<sup>46</sup> Such groups, often considered online cafes, are examples of virtual public “spheres,” typically consisting of ongoing discussions of particular issues from progressive perspectives. Moreover, they often act as nodal points in information networks, relaying stories from alternative media, sometimes mainstream media and other networks, as well as distributing information from a large number of activist organizations.

#### ***5 Radical geeks:***

In the early days of the of the newly commercialized Internet, some social critics suggested that much like televisions, people would sit glued to their screens in passive thralldom to computer games, pornography or shopping sites. And while pornography may well be the largest category of commercial sites - there are more than 100,000 porn sites at last count - we have witnessed a vast number of progressive activist computer users in various social movements. These include Cybernetic Revolution ([www.Cy-rev.com](http://www.Cy-rev.com)), Computer Professionals for Social Democracy ([www.cpsr.org/internetdemocracy](http://www.cpsr.org/internetdemocracy)), Committee for Democracy in Information Technology ([www.cdi.org.br/](http://www.cdi.org.br/)), and the union-oriented Labortech ([www.labortech.org/](http://www.labortech.org/)). The Electronic Frontier Foundation ([www.eff.org](http://www.eff.org)) is dedicated to protecting rights and freedoms in the digital world.

One of the most important activities of such groups is providing computer/Internet training and access to the poor and powerless, often providing people with occupational skills that in turn act as resources that enhance agency. Computer Technology Centers ([www.ctcnet.org/](http://www.ctcnet.org/)) have established close to 1000 community computer-training sites; the CDIT has developed 770 Information Technology and Citizen Rights Schools (708 in 20 Brazilian states and 62 abroad within 11 countries). They have provided training and Internet access for  $\frac{3}{4}$  million of Brazil’s poor from indigenous people of the upper Amazon struggling against land encroachment to the *favelas* of Rio. Wherever such skills are acquired, people, individually or collectively, gain power to confront domination, whether they are poor farmers in an agricultural collective or women gaining power vis-a-vis patriarchal husbands.

Many computer activists also challenge Microsoft’s domination of software and have chosen Linux over Windows to take advantage of the more democratic and participatory aspects of “open source” programming in which modifications and changes

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<sup>45</sup> Anhier et als. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/PDF/Ch1.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> This author is a moderator of Progressive Sociologists Network, and a founding member of Global Studies Association-North America.



can be made by anyone, and available to anyone.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Linux is nearly free of charge, which affords many underfunded ISMs or NGOs an economic advantage.

## **B) Global justice, global forums, and anti-war movements:**

Throughout the third world, there has been a long history of NGOs concerned with a variety of causes - poverty and economic justice, labor and worker rights, feminism, human rights, the environment, etc. More recently we have seen a growing number of INGO and transnational advocacy groups (see Keck and Sikkink 1998). These organizations quickly embraced the Internet and just as quickly established linkages to more established trans-national advocacy groups like Human Rights Watch, *Medecins Sans Frontiers* and Greenpeace. While there are great differences between these NGO and advocacy group with the new ISMs, they share some vision of an *alternative* form of globalization that provides justice, dignity and decent lives for everyone as opposed to the adverse effects of the current neo-liberal globalization.

### ***1 Global Justice***

ISM's are qualitatively different beginning with the fact that they did not so much embrace the Internet; *the Internet was absolutely essential for creating the various kinds of "virtual public spheres" that were noted, and for actively recruiting and organizing various kinds of cyberactivism, beginning with mass participation that is more likely to specifically target the regulatory agencies of neo-liberal capital such as the IMF, WTO, World Bank and WEF.* Many of the ISMs that are primarily concerned with global economic rights and inequality have constituted the core of what would become national, transnational, and ultimately global actions and forums, with the World Social Forum (see below) being the primary forum for such groups. Among the more prominent of these is ATTAC (<http://www.attac.org/indexen/index.html>), which was founded in France and now has chapters in more than 30 countries; its website is available in 15 languages. One of ATTAC's major goals is a small tax on economic transactions to be used to benefit poor and debtor nations. Others include Global Exchange ([www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org)), Mobilization for Social Justice ([sept.globalizethis.org/](http://sept.globalizethis.org/)), Fifty Years is Enough ([www.50years.org/](http://www.50years.org/)), and Jobs with Justice ([www.jwj.org](http://www.jwj.org)). Some ISMs and actions may target specific Nation-States that seem guilty or at least tolerant of various abuses and repression. Many of the ISMs may direct actions toward transnational corporations themselves. Thus if a Swiss-based company like Nestle provides potentially dangerous infant formula to South America, protest actions might include organizing consumer boycotts in the United States.

The older NGOs or advocacy groups are more likely to consist of full-time workers and volunteers that work in somewhat structured organizations with offices and professional officials. They primarily ask members supporters for money to carry on their good work. The ISMs have fewer, if any, actual offices, and anyone can provide information, make suggestions or whatever. For example, anyone can post information to Indymedia.com. *The ISMs depend far more on CMC to distribute information, debate and frame issues and strategies, and organize a variety of actions.* While surely

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.opensource.org>

marches and mass protests may get some public notice, these are only a few of the tactics that can be virtually organized (See below pp. xx)

Finally, a number of the ISMs consist of relatively small regional networks such as the Islamic feminist networks studied by Moghadam (2002). Similarly, many smaller networked groups are concerned with relatively specific issues or problems that tend to be globally dispersed but may be addressed by only a few groups. For example, some indigenous groups have been able to establish connections with each other around the world; a water conservation project in Brazil might share information with a counterpart in Thailand, while a feminist organization in Egypt may link up with one in the Philippines.

## ***2. The World Social Forum movement***

Historically, as NGOs and/or resistance SMOs began to use the Internet, it would then become a matter of time before various activist groups, NGOs and/or academics would forge linkages with each other. With the growing alternative globalization movements that proliferated with the use of the Internet, it was inevitable that representatives of such organizations would gather together, given their common goals and shared understandings of the consequences of neo-liberalism. In response to the World Economic Forum, the gathering of the elites of global capital, the first World Social Forum (WSF) was launched in January 2001. More than 50,000 people attended the first meeting, representing a variety of NGOs, INGOS, activist movements and regional social forums. The WSF gave voice and hope to the multitudes who face the injustices and adversities of globalization. Yet the WSF's core belief is that "Another World Is Possible." There have now been three such forums in Porto Alegre, Brazil and one in Mumbai, India, as well dozens of related regional, national and local forums around the world.

There are two very important factors that made Porto Alegre the "natural" site for these meetings. Brazil, the economic powerhouse of South America, is the eighth-largest economic power in the world, yet it has among the most extreme inequalities of wealth and power. It has a large number of NGOs. Further, its recently formed workers party, the PT (*Partidada Trabalhadores*), has become a major player in the political arena<sup>48</sup>. In 2003, Lula da Silva, a long time labor activist and social movement organizer, was the newly elected president. He came to welcome and address the WSF at an outdoor amphitheater where more than 200,000 people cheered, entranced by a political leader, as Lula's low-keyed, self-assured charisma articulated a spellbinding vision for social justice.<sup>49</sup>

It is often unclear as to just what the WSF is, and its organizers continue to debate this question (See Waterman, 2004b). It is not a labor union, an advocacy network, an *Internationale* or a political party; it does not itself have an agenda or specific goals,

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<sup>48</sup> The PT is a left workers party, reformist, not revolutionary. Brazil does have socialist and communist parties, but the PT has broader support, including that of many of the professional classes, intellectuals etc. Thus while Lula cancelled an order for F-15 fighters, he did not repudiate the IMF debt.

<sup>49</sup> (For evaluations of WSF-03, see [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.asp?pagina=balancos\\_fsm2003\\_ing](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.asp?pagina=balancos_fsm2003_ing) )

rather it attempts to bring many otherwise globally dispersed activists and intellectuals together. But is it an arena or an actory. It attempts to be democratic, but it has a self-selected leadership structure. At the 2004 meetings in Mumbai, a coalition of older communist and liberation movement veterans staged an alternative gathering arguing that the WSF and its NGOs were simply instruments of global capital that privatized and outsourced many services heretofore provided by governments. NGO leaders were seen as a well paid class of professional social service administrators, doing their jobs for the sake of capital. In any event, the WSF is ambiguous, contested, and criticized, it is also one of the largest gathering places in the world for various organizations from NGOs and INGOs to advocacy groups and indeed, many of the ISM cyberactivist organizations discussed herein are represented in the meetings and the exhibition halls.

The WSF consists of a number of plenary sessions of progressive notables such as Susan George, Tariq Ali, Walden Bello, Arundati Roy, Jose Bove, or Noam Chomsky, and more than a thousand workshops covering a wide range of perhaps 1,500 groups (see [wsf.org](http://wsf.org)). There are communists seeking revolution along with transvestites and transgendered people seeking recognition and dignity. But for the most part, it is a collection of democratic and progressive organizations from throughout the world. Workshops are conducted on specific topics, including the use of the Internet by Internet based organizations. Although it is primarily a forum for activists, there are a number of left academics, including some sociologists, economists, political scientists, etc. It should be noted that while most of the people involved represent the weak and powerless, the size and growth of the WSF has meant that is becoming a significant global voice now confronting the economic elites.

While the contemporary ISMs, qua “mobilizing networks” whose nodal points exist in cyberspace, we must not forget that activists are nevertheless embodied agents. Given the diversity of progressive agendas, albeit with a common concern for global justice, forums like WFS or regional/local social forums must be understood sociologically as well as politically. More specifically, such gatherings not only serve as places to gain information, share ideas, formulate policies and plan concerted actions, ***but they need be understood as solidarity rituals***. Otherwise said, one of the most important sociological aspects of a social forum is its function as a solidarity ritual, establishing new social bonds, reaffirming established bonds, re-invigorating and renewing progressive identities often based on common cultural political roots analogous to the totemic ancestors of the Arunta described by Durkheim a century ago. Like a religious gathering, the WSF provides a set of beliefs and practices about justice and injustice that unites global activists into a community affirming a common identity and devotion to a more just world. Many of the plenaries are more like religious rituals in which emotional arousal is more salient than intellectual analysis. Addresses by Arundhati Roy might be considered the “Sermons on the Global Mountain” that explain and decry the nature of global injustice while evoking powerful emotions that enthrall vast crowds. Such ritual gatherings are essential for transformative social moments. The WSF is slowly emerging

as a social force to be reckoned with as the symbol of growing resistance to neo-liberalism.<sup>50</sup>

### ***3. Anti-war Mobilization.***

Following 9/11, it seemed as if the growing alternative globalization movements came to a halt. The WTC was the Ur symbol of world capitalism, and the Pentagon its policeman. Yet after 3,000 people died, there was a massive outpouring of sympathy and a momentary waning of the fervor of the AJMs. But when the Bush administration moved to make war on Iraq, there was an immediate and massive response. Even before the war, there were massive protests throughout the world. Indeed there were two such marches held at the 2002 WSF. Shortly thereafter, on February 15<sup>th</sup>, the largest demonstration in history took place as more than 10 million people in 350 cities across the world marched in protest. ***The rapid mobilization, coordination, and size of these protests was a direct result of the Internet and the existence of a large number of global justice movements.*** There were analyses of American imperialism, its resource wars, and its attempt to control the global economy. The agenda of the ultra right wing Project for a New American Century became widely known outside the circles of policy wonks. While most people were adversely impacted by globalization, especially job losses, retrenchments in entitlements and public services, nevertheless the USA could commit billions of dollars to military hardware, training and personnel, and to its war effort. Further understandings of the war noted the class and race basis of the military, the gendering of the war, the environmental damage from depleted uranium munitions and other issues.

The military battles war did not last long, about seventeen days from the time of the invasion to the fall of Baghdad. While the anticipated intervention served to mobilize millions of protestors, the “liberation” of Baghdad and scenes of “happy” Iraqis diffused the thrusts of demonstrations. World opinion in general had no influence on George W. Bush. The war was too short and “successful” for a fledgling anti-war movement to itself become a major force. Moreover, the sheer numbers and goals of the AJM and AGM movements did not lend themselves to a concerted action. Even in the face of growing numbers of casualties and revelations of perverted tortures inflicted by American guards at Abu Ghraib, massive anti-war mobilizations did not take place. Yet over time, support for the war declined. But it may well be that for ISMs, the mass demonstrations may no longer have the saliency they did for earlier generations. Many of the organization and leaders of these movements did become involved with a variety of movements and campaigns to oust George W. Bush. The centrality of the Internet to the Dean campaign was the top news of its day. Moreover, it’s becoming clear that many young voters have been recruited to register and vote as a result of either the availability of information on the Internet that runs contrary to that of the administration and the mainstream media, or due to the many ISMs that have reached out to so many voters otherwise considered marginal.

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<sup>50</sup> In many earlier social movements from abolition to the anti-war movements of the ‘60s, churches were often meeting sites for activists, especially for the civil rights movements when ministers such as Revs. King, Abernathy or Jackson played central roles.

### **C. From virtual networks to cyberactivism**

How do we move from online chat groups, virtual public spheres, e-journals and blogs to actual social transformation? On the one hand, there are certain things one can do alone such as provide some news or information to a website, run a blog, or even hactivism. But most such activism require groups but such groups often have strong differences of opinion and approaches. Some organize marches and protests; others seek to impact electoral politics by supporting “friendly” candidates who shape State policies. Others, with a more anarchist orientation, see all elected States as hopelessly aligned with global capital and focus efforts on local conditions, seeking to empower local actors by providing job skills, economic projects or legal protections. Sometimes activist organizations may initiate consumer boycotts of the products of certain companies such as the Nestle campaign mentioned previously. Other boycotts can be directed at the exports of certain nations, South Africa under apartheid or Chile under Pinochet. Consumer boycotts have a long history, but what is now relevant is the extent to which boycotts can be globally organized. While it is unlikely that a boycott can put a company out of business, it can adversely affect the company’s image-in an era when image is everything. A boycott by only a few percent of a large market can affect bottom lines, the only thing that really shapes corporate actions.

Simply providing information over the Internet that is not usually available can itself have influence, especially since many young people no longer read newspapers or watch television to get the news. Thus revelations of government or corporate malfeasance, injustice or corruption can often have major consequences. The waning of support for the war in Vietnam began with the revealing of the Pentagon Papers by the young Seymour Hirsch. So too did the revelations of sado-masochistic torture and humiliation at Abu Ghraib, captured on digital cameras and transmitted on the Internet, revealed by the older Seymour Hirsch, contribute to the much more rapid erosion of popular support for the Iraq invasion. Similarly, we have recently seen a number of anti-gay politicians being outed on the Internet and being forced to resign or opting not to seek re-election.

While organizing mass protests and demonstrations may be the most obvious ways that ISMs might publicize grievances, such publicity and awareness depends on the mass media, which as was noted has become more commodified, centralized, and tied to the global elites. Demonstrations are often ignored, or if they are reported, participation is undercounted, participants and causes are framed to marginalized the causes and the small numbers of the more bizarre or violent participants are given most of the attention to discredit the protestors and the causes. For example, many demonstrations against either global capital or the American invasion of Iraq have been organized as carnivals, and in turn, the media have focused on wacky costumes and makeup rather than the issues addressed.<sup>51</sup> The New York Times paid scant attention to the WSF 2004 in Mumbai, but they did note the animated dancing, music and parades of the Dalats and indigenous people while the issues addressed were ignored. But as it would turn out, that

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<sup>51</sup> Parenthetically, the recent celebration of carnival in Germany took on a very strong political slant supporting Prime Minister Schroeder and his opposition to US policy in Iraq.  
<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0227-09.htm>

dancing and music represented a dynamism and major mobilization of the marginal peoples untouched by the economic “miracle” of the computer industries in the cities. The VJP party in power was soundly defeated by the more leftist Congress Party. Sometimes demonstrations and protests do impact policy (see below, p. xx).

The ultimate goal of most ISM actions is to effect policy changes and/or social changes that promote various forms of social justice. Although many ISMs debate strategies, especially the value of impacting Nation-States, the global regulating organizations or global corporations, many of efforts do attempt to change policies at these levels. Indeed in a number of recent cases, ISMs have been able to influence State policies and States have in turn impacted the WTO, which has recently sided with developing countries against the developed in a number of cases.

One might also note the role of online action, the most common of which has been “hactivism,” the intentional use of the Internet as a means of “grass root” electronic protest that might be considered civil disobedience to promote a political ideology supporting the open exchange of information. Despite Hollywood visions of “hackers” starting WW III, setting off nuclear weapons, grounding all air travel, or transferring millions of dollars into their personal accounts, far more likely forms include overwhelming targeted servers, inserting viruses or defacing “enemy” websites.<sup>52</sup> Hactivism, as a grass roots technique, has become a way of contesting domination and repression.<sup>53</sup> For example, in 2000, Electrohippies ([www.gn.apc.org/pmhp/ehippies](http://www.gn.apc.org/pmhp/ehippies)) organized a “WTO virtual sit-in” that overloaded the machines keeping the World Trade Organization's Web pages on the Internet.<sup>54</sup> One of the most dramatic examples of hactivism was the outrage of the hacker community to a case of site infringement by eToys Inc. The resulting hacker attack, called TOYWAR, led to the decimation of eToys Inc. stock, which fell from \$67 the day the battle began to \$15, when the company finally acceded to their claims - after losing \$4.5 billion.<sup>55</sup>

#### **D. What has been done?**

Have the various ISMs described been anything more than interesting side shows to the larger, globalized political economy? As Calhoun (2004) notes, while an international public sphere clearly exists, promises of universal “cosmopolitan democracy” remain unfulfilled. The demise of neo-liberal capital does not seem imminent. On the one hand, the dispersal of Internet participation and a plurality of often-competing organizations, goals and orientations lends itself to fragmentation and difficulty establishing a united front. Moreover, while demonstrations may attract the media for a short time, just how much impact these demonstrations and movements have is debatable. Inequality has not abated, global warming seems to be growing, and global concerns with terrorism have shunted these concerns to a back burner.

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<sup>52</sup> It has been reported that Israeli and Palestinian hackers are constantly trying to put pornography on each other's websites.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.wired.com/news/infostructure/0,1377,64193,00.html>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.alternet.org/story/9223>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.sniggle.net/hactivism.php>

But let us also be reminded that if we date capitalism from the early Renaissance, it took many centuries for it to move from a marginal group of itinerant merchants to an alternative network of markets to the now-dominant global market economy. If we date Internet activism from the Zapatistas' entrance on the scene, or to the mobilization against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and Trade (MAI), or to the Seattle demonstrations of 1999, then we must note that they have had little time to develop and flourish. Moreover, as Castells (1996) noted, there is no Winter Palace to storm; rather there are a number of widely dispersed struggles, from the landless peasants of Brazil to the sex trade in Thailand or the polluting industries of the Pearl River Delta.

But that said, there have been a number of victories and triumphs. For example, a victory against neo-liberalism took place at the Miami meetings of the Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA), a NAFTA for the all the Americas that would benefit companies in the U.S. Thousands of protesters, organized by ISMs, came from all over the Americas and converged on this city for Friday's March for Global Justice despite the Miami-Dade County police's massive show of force to intimidate the opposition. That the people were not cowed was evident at the "Gala for Global Justice" on the evening of Wednesday, November 19. Opposition to the FTAA and people coming together for "another world" was the theme of event, which featured a program of music and speeches from activists from throughout the Americas. The anti-FTAA forces were victorious.

Another important victory for the global justice movements was the breakup and failure of the 5<sup>th</sup> WTO meeting in Cancun. Some of the planning and organization for that confrontation took place at the WSF meeting in Porto Alegre and was continued online by a number of different organizations. These included the International Indigenous and Farmers Forum, the People's Forum, the International Women's Forum, the International Trade Unions Forum (organized by the Mexican independent trade unions), several activities organized by NGOs and foreign organizations, a Youth Camp organized by Mexican students and youth, the Indymedia Center and the International Parliamentary Forum.<sup>56</sup> One of the most important consequences of the Cancun debacle was the emergence of the Group of 21, an organization of developing countries including Brazil, China and India. The nations in this group, representing about 1/3 of the world's population, have joined together to challenge the neo-liberal policies that have advantaged the more affluent companies of developed countries.

More recently we might note the durability of the populist Chavez government in Venezuela. Despite U.S. attempts to dislodge him, his 60% support in the referendum to unseat him was an indication of the power of the progressive ISMs to help Chavez gain support as alternative news sites revealed how much support the U.S. gave to the economic elites. We might also note how popular pressures of the AGM/AJMs have played a part in electing left-leaning presidents like Lula in Brazil and Kirchner in Argentina; it seems as if a left government is about to be elected in Uruguay. This would have major consequences, making Mercosul, the regional trading bloc, a formidable power resisting neo-liberalism. Finally, while it may not be headline news, the WTO has recently sided with Brazil in a case against the U.S. over soybean subsidies. More

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<sup>56</sup> [http://alainet.org/active/show\\_text.php3?key=4921](http://alainet.org/active/show_text.php3?key=4921)

specifically, U.S. agribusiness is highly subsidized by the government to keep the prices below parity with Brazilian producers, an unfair advantage in the huge global market for soybeans. That Brazil has become a major player in global markets, while often challenging neo-liberal practices, is due in no small part to the leadership of Lula that was in turn a result of a huge coalition of progressive forces in Brazil, including a number of ISMs.

## CONCLUSIONS

One of the foundational themes of Critical Theory has been a critique of the epistemology of social theory. Most theory, especially in social science, attempted to model itself after the physical sciences, what Habermas (1971) called the “practical interests” in rationally controlling the world. But such theories not only dehumanized social actors, their “value neutrality,” sustaining the status quo, served to reproduce domination. Academic sociology in general, and social movement theory in particular, has more often than not acceded to this canon. As such, “emancipatory interests” that free consciousness through the critique of domination, has been neutralized or marginalized - stigmatized as irrelevant philosophy or political diatribe rather than legitimate social theory. Yet like Count Dracula, Critical theory not only refuses to die, but the growing injustices of the present age of neo-liberal capitalist globalization, foregrounded by an imminent ecological collapse, have led to renewed and growing interest in this tradition.

Given the growing critiques of globalization both inside and outside the academy, and growing progressive social mobilizations (many of which take place in the third world) the theories of social movements initiated by Critical Theory, while needing revision for the present age, still provide considerable insights. The key elements of such a revision begin with the failure of academic social movement theory to 1) move beyond grant-funded empiricism; 2) to eschew “objectivity” in the face of the unjust suffering of perhaps one third of the world; and 3) to consider the profound implications of technological advances of computers, the Internet and even cell phones as integral moments of contemporary struggles. As has been argued in this paper, a contemporary theory of social movements must consider 1) the central role of electronic media and global networks in enabling “virtual public spheres”; 2) the crises of legitimacy and impacts of economic, political, cultural, and ecological aspects of neo-liberal globalization; 3) the migration of these crises to realms of identity and motivation and emergent forms of progressive project identities that would seek to transform the social; and finally, 4) the extent to which internetworked movements, more as flows than organizations, are fundamentally different than earlier social movements.

Mass literacy, following the printing of the Gutenberg Bible, ironically led to questioning of authority that contributed to the Reformation and in turn the religious wars that ended with the Treaty of Westphalia. Literacy became an essential condition for “civil society,” a space of interactions, discourses and ideas apart from work, family, or the newly emergent market economy. For Habermas (1989), the central moment of civil society was its “public sphere” where Enlightenment ideas, available as printed media, were discussed and debated in coffeehouses and salons. The bourgeoisie embraced Reason as a cultural ideology that was critical of dynastic rule while providing legitimacy



claims for “democratic rule” in the name of the “people” an “imagined community” of political actors created by “print capitalism” (Anderson, 1983). As the bourgeoisie assumed power and hegemony, new contradictions emerged. The modern State, as Weber (1946) reminded us, was based on domination sustained by monopolization of legitimate violence. Despite the promises of freedom and democracy, a new system of bourgeois domination emerged that would eventually comprise a transnational capitalist class controlling a global capitalist system (Sklair 2001).

Contemporary globalization has depended on CMCs for communication, coordination and control of widely dispersed economic and political networks. But these same networks were easily adapted to the distribution of news and information. The Internet became an important innovation in communication media that enabled relatively inexpensive, instantaneous communication from the many to that many. The Internet quickly became a general tool for the exchange of information and, in turn, the basis of various online activist virtual communities that acted as “public spheres.” More and more people were recruited to such spheres by virtue of their political sentiments and/or connections to like-minded folks. At the same time, many people happened upon and began participation in these spheres and their movements. As a result, new progressive project identities oriented to various aspects of global justice were fashioned and negotiated. This in turn enabled the rapid rise of various global justice movements.

These new kinds of network-based movements and identities were first evident with the Zapatista movement of the early ‘90s. Again the growing power of these movements were seen with the massive protests in Seattle, Montreal and Genoa, and more recently, as noted, Miami and Cancun. Today, these “internetworked social movements” with a global reach embody new forms of grassroots approach, organization and ideological formations as they challenge, resist and contest multiple types of domination while offering the vision of a better world. Kahn and Kellner (2003) attribute this shared vision to inter-group communication via the Internet:

Through the practice of the type of large-scale organization and assimilation afforded by the Internet, many opponents of capitalist globalization evolved from a simple sub- cultural nihilism to recognize the need for a global movement with a positive vision....The anti-capitalist globalization movements began advocating common values and visions, and started defining themselves in positive terms such as the global justice movement....The global internet, then, is creating the base and the basis for an unparalleled worldwide anti-war/pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war, and intense political struggle. Correspondingly, the Internet itself has undergone radical transformations during this time. New web forms of design, such as web logs and wikis have evolved the Internet’s hypertextual architecture, even as such online phenomena as hacker culture, terrorism, and Internet militancy have emerged from the technical-fringe to become a central feature of everyday life on the world wide web.<sup>57</sup>

Internet-enabled ISMs have now become the primary basis of resistance and struggle against the globalized neoliberal capitalism, corporate power and privilege that have so

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<sup>57</sup> Kahn and Kellner, 2003

adversely impacted the majority of the world's peoples. The AGMs/AJMs are fluid movements, flows of contesting power from the grassroots that foster and fashion a number of diverse progressive, project identities. They are united by an overarching concern for social justice and act as the impetus for emancipatory visions of freedom, justice and democratic communities in a networked world, itself more fluid, flexible and complex.

Most academic social movement theory can at best deal with limited aspects of these new kinds of mobilizations that must be located in a globalized “network society.” The work of Castells (1997) pioneered theorizing the new global realities and the directions of social movements, and indicating the emergence of a new kind of global, network politics.<sup>58</sup> But that work had little impact, other than being cited, on social movement theory, in large part because such theorizing demands a multi-level approach to a more fluid kind of society, yet such theorizing demands a robust concept of agency at the level of both identity and “mobilizing structures.” Most articulations of identity, collectively and individually, have been colonized and serve as moments of hegemonic process that reproduce domination (Langman 2000). Nevertheless, crises and contradictions within the social structure, and/or between its dominant values and actual practices, can however challenge identity constructions that in turn attempt to effect emancipatory social change. The legacy of Critical Theory offers a comprehensive framework to both chart the new forms of social mobilizations and, at the same time, inspire participation in the struggle for global justice. Moreover, its critiques of economic, political, technological, cultural and even psychological domination are the starting points for imagining that, as the WSF proclaims, “another world is possible.”

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<sup>58</sup> See also Bennett, 2003.

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